



Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048. Our telephone number is (212) 432-5707. Send e-mail to: NYABG@worldnet.att.net. *Update* provides current information about New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context. This publication is made possible with funds provided by the U.S. General Services Administration under contract number 2PCB-CM-97-0154.

Editor-In-Chief: Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

Senior Editor/
Design & Layout: Emilyn L. Brown

Contributors: Michael L. Blakey
Emilyn L. Brown
Donna Harden Cole
Peggy King Jorde
Tamara R. Jubilee
Allison Manfra
Joan Maynard
Kimberly Paggett
Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

Technical Assist.: Donna Harden Cole,
Deinabo George, Tamara R. Jubilee,
Allison Manfra, Leona Shuler.

In This Issue...

Sankofa II: An African Burial Ground
Project Report3

Bound in the North: A Symbolic
Narrative Seen Through the African
Burial Ground.....8

Voices of Old New York.....14

and more!

The African Burial Ground: Continued Research and Preservation or "Business as Usual?"

Dear Friends of the African Burial Ground:

The time is now or never. In the early 1990s African Americans established their ability to stop construction, create a memorial and interpretive center, and conduct scientific research that would treat the ancestor's lives with proper respect for all time. The struggle to do so, however, continues today as the same tendency of the General Services Administration (GSA) that sought to make our ancestry cheap in 1991 is behind a new effort to end the African Burial Ground Project before it has been completed.

For the past six months it has appeared that GSA is 1) imposing less qualified GSA employees over qualified African American consultants, 2) discontinuing African American involvement except for a recently assembled "National Management Team" of GSA officials, and 3) is reneging on funding for important research that is necessary to complete the research design that GSA is obligated to implement under the Memorandum of Agreement. The continued authority of the existing project directors to implement what we all promised we would do will be wiped away by this Spring unless the public reaffirms its desire to have us complete the job that the descendant community negotiated with GSA in 1993.

Let there be no misunderstanding. We have done our job up until now. With respect to the anthropological research, I know that it may seem slow and tedious at times. As the biggest, most sophisticated, and most noted bioarchaeological project in the United States, one can expect unusual time, effort, and technical problems. We planned for this and are within a reasonable range of our projected time frame for completing the project. Last summer, we completed the most awesome work of skeletal recordation and provided GSA with a draft report totaling nearly 2,000 pages.

(continued on page 11)

"You may write me down in history with your bitter, twisted lies, you may trod me in the very dirt but still, like dust I'll rise."

----- Maya Angelou



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



CONGRATULATIONS TO OPEI'S SHORT STORY WINNERS!

Congratulations to the winners of the OPEI's First Annual Short Story competition. That the African Burial Ground encourages so many facets of scholarship -- including science, history, culture and literature -- is an astonishing legacy for the thousands of men, women and children who were reposed in its soil. My thanks to each of the three writers for their wonderful stories.

Christopher Moore
Brooklyn, New York

Just a note to say how nice it was to read about the short story competition in the recent newsletter. I was very honored to have read at the awards ceremony and to have had yet another opportunity to mingle with the fascinating and truly nice people who are drawn to as a part of the Burial Ground Project...Thanks so much again for supporting "Once Upon This River."

Sharon Dennis Wyeth
Upper Montclair, NJ

[Ed. Note: Sharon D. Wyeth is the author of "Once Upon This River", a historical novel which deals with Africans in colonial New York City. Although written for young readers, adults will find it interesting as well.]

FACING HISTORY

I would like to thank you and your staff on behalf of Facing History and Ourselves for the lecture and tour on August 6th. As I described to you earlier, the group we brought was in the latter stages of a one-week institute introducing them to Facing History. By the time we brought them to the African Burial Ground for the lecture and tour, the participants, all of whom are teachers in New York City or its suburbs, were mentally, emotionally, and physically drained from a challenging week. The trip to your offices and the site was a wonderful way to re-engage them, show them a resource to which they can bring their students, and help them to make connections between memory and democracy. They left refreshed, excited, and enthusiastic about bringing their classes to your office as part of a Facing History Course.

I hope you will be able to share this letter and my thanks with Donna Cole, Marie Alice Devieux, and Chadra Pittman, all of whom were excellent facilitators. Their expertise, knowledge, and warmth were appreciated by all of us. Also, please share my thanks with Leona Shuler who was so instrumental in setting up this event.

Kevin Feinberg, Program Assoc.
Facing History and Ourselves

ACADEMIA AND ACTIVISM

I must thank you and your staff for the very informative package on the African Burial Ground, it can't be expressed enough how important it is for African people to reconnect to their African past, and every experience has a lesson in itself. I pray that it is the ancestral will that you continue to be prosperous in all your endeavors. And remember, the academics are meaningless if it cannot reach the neighborhoods and streets. The street activism is meaningless if it cannot be fed the information of academia (African-centered).

Respectfully,
Charles,
New York, NY

FEEDBACK

I'm writing to say thank you for the presentation given for the Writers HotSpot group on Friday, September 4th. For many of the group it was their first trip to New York, and the African Burial Ground was the first item on the itinerary. Most of the group said afterwards that the trip to New York was worth it just to go to the African Burial Ground....Thank you so much for the invaluable work that you and the rest of the team are doing.

Yours sincerely,
Kadija George
Saks Media
London, England

**OPEI welcomes letters but reserves
the right to edit for length or clarity.**



Sankofa II:

The African Burial Ground Project Conference,
held at the Moton Center,
Cappahosic, Virginia, October 1-4, 1998

Compiled by Emilyn L. Brown

The question of who speaks for the ancestors of New York's African Burial Ground was answered by African American community protest in 1991. Among the significant victories that followed, was the community's mandate that the 427 remains excavated from the site be transferred to Howard University, under the scientific direction of Dr. Michael L. Blakey. This transfer generated new questions about future research goals and methods. Equally important, what would be the continuing role of the community?

As early as 1992, Dr. Blakey had already begun to organize a "dream team," choosing individuals who demonstrated a willingness, in his words, "to commit to the same struggle in which the descendant community was then engaged" (See *Update*, Vol. 1, No. 10:3). In November of 1995, this group attended the first Sankofa Conference, representing an extraordinary scope of disciplines. The fields of physical and cultural anthropology, archaeology, history, Computer Aided Digital Design (CADD) African art history, genetics and craniometrics were represented by individuals who, for the first time, were able to meet and discuss Project goals, and organize specific work tasks around four broad themes: 1) African origins, 2) quality of life, 3) biological and cultural transformation and 4) modes of resistance to enslavement.

Many of the plans associated with this first comprehensive meeting were presented at Sankofa II, held this past October. A three day conference, Sankofa II was organized around an ambitious agenda that left plenty of

room for many lively debates ranging from the social and political implications of language which degrades African people, to the more practical considerations of creating a seamless report that fully integrates this unprecedented, interdisciplinary approach. Group discussions also offered critical opportunities to enlarge upon or create new strategies between disciplines, bringing greater clarity and focus in problem areas of research. Although limited space prevents a full report of Sankofa II reports, some of the updates presented by attendees are briefly summarized below so that our readers can gain some idea of the scope and nature of collaborative research currently underway (for specific new findings please see Dr. Blakey's letter page 11). *Please keep in mind that much of the scientific research, specifically in the areas of physical anthropology, archaeology and genetics, has been canceled due to the General Service Administration's decision in June of 1998 to stop funding.*

Physical Anthropology

Professor Mark Mack, Director of the Cobb Laboratory reported that over the last five years the laboratory staff focused much of their efforts on the formidable task of cleaning, reconstructing, creating an inventory, and making assessments of all skeletal remains excavated from the African Burial Ground. The assessments were based on dental, skeletal and pathological (relating to or caused by disease) examinations. All phases of the dental assessments have been completed and inventoried, with morphologies (tooth shape), attrition (dental wear) and pathologies documented.

Samples of calculus, or, what Mark refers to as "fossilized tartar," have been collected in order to reconstruct the diet of individuals towards the end of their lives. He stressed the importance of setting up a separate database for dental assessments since the measurements, morphology, and attrition help make distinctions between adults and children or males and females.

Once the pathological examinations were completed by osteologists (bone specialists), the remains were prepared for specialized research. Samples taken from long bones (the femur, the long bone between the hip and the knee) were used for mitochondrial DNA testing (see genetics report below).

Radiography or x-rays of mandibles (lower jaw bone) have been completed up to burial 225, and Mark indicates that there are 55 which have remained intact. This is important because, like the teeth, mandibles also show the development and the age of individuals. Similarly, x-rays have been taken of the long bones up to burial 260 and of the crania (area of skull which encases the brain) up to burial 200.

On the question of origins, Mark plans to compare existing research that documents tooth modification in Africa, with individuals from the African Burial Ground whose incisors had been deliberately filed or modified. At least eight different tooth modification patterns have already been identified (see *Update* Vol. 1, No. 6:4). He was quick to caution however, that "a particular style may show up in Mozambique, southeastern Angola or in Eastern Ghana, so it may not allow us to pinpoint specific-

cally, ethnic groups but it may allow us, based on other anthropological research, to say those people with dental modifications were born and raised in Africa."

Among the tasks left for the laboratory staff to complete is the organization of a database catalog for 55,000 slides that document the skeletal remains, determining the age and gender of the entire skeletal population, and comparative testing with other populations using, for example, the dental assessments. A major accomplishment for the physical anthropology team was the completion of a draft Skeletal Biology Report on the origins, health, and demography of the remains, submitted to GSA last summer.

History

According to Dr. Edna Medford, Associate Director of the Historical Component, the team of historians are conducting their research in a diasporic context since "many eighteenth century African New Yorkers would have been born outside of the city (and colony) and would have brought certain experiences with them that doubtless shaped their responses to conditions and circumstances they encountered in colonial New York." A diasporic perspective enables the researchers to trace the process of biological and cultural transformations, which is why the historical team consists of Africanists and Caribbeanists, as well as those who specialize in the experiences of African people in America.

Dr. Medford indicated that much of the research for West and West Central Africa and the Caribbean has been completed. The Africanists have occupied themselves primarily with the question of origins: what ethnic groups would have been likely victims of enslavement and transport to the Americas in general and to New York specifically? They have also researched social customs and practices, labor



Sankofa II participants from left to right: Back row: Joseph Jones, Mark Mack, Robert L. Bethea Jr., Rick Kittles, Chris DeCorse, Augustin Holl; Second Row: Edna Medford, Michael Gomez, Joseph Inikori, Sheila Walker, Kwaku Ofori-Ansa, Jean Cerasale, Allan Goodman, Peggy King Jorde, Russell Adams, Linda Heywood, Michael L. Blakey, Selwyn H.H. Carrington. First Row: Warren Perry, Emilyn L. Brown, Fatimah Jackson, Sherrill D. Wilson, Leslie Rankin Hill, Jean Howson. Team specialists not pictured include Kofi Agorsah, Theresa Singleton, Shomarka Keita, and Matthew George, and others.

Photo credit: Moton Center Staff

regimens, diet, disease and other aspects of living conditions among certain ethnic groups in West and West Central Africa. Caribbean research has centered on similar areas.

The historians are analyzing plantation logs, medical and death records, official colonial documents and personal papers that illuminate the experiences of African people in the West Indies.

The New York research continues, with special attention being given to the variety and methods of labor from an age, gender and seasonal perspective, social and cultural practices, living conditions, and other factors that would provide historical context for the findings resulting from study of the physical remains. The wide range of documentary evidence being consulted includes municipal and colonial office records, court cases (both criminal and civil), advertisements for the return of runaways, medical logs, diaries and other personal papers, wills and certain genealogical data. All of the historical data collected from research on Africa,

the Caribbean and colonial New York are linked through a database. This database will play a crucial role as historians conclude the interpretive phase of their work in the coming months.

Archaeology

The archaeological component has already provided a great deal of information about the African Burial Ground population through material culture (see *Update Vol. 2, No. 2:1*). But Dr. Warren Perry, Associate Director for Archaeology indicates there are still some lingering problems. During site excavation, which took place between 1991-92, documentation of the burials was not clearly recorded. Since most of the original excavation crew has moved on, or has been unwilling to cooperate, stratigraphic analysis has become a difficult process. Each strata or layer of soil provides a natural timeline that helps archaeologists determine which burials are the oldest.

Aside from stratigraphic difficulties, a great deal of progress continues to be made. The relational database estab-

lished by the archaeological crew allows them to access field notes and observations, burial records, profiles, inventory of all features and soil descriptions and colors. An inventory of all field color photographs has been entered into a separate database. Also completed is a preliminary report based on soil samples, the arduous task of identifying and cataloging hundreds of pieces of shell, and the processing of identifiable artifacts associated with burials 1 through 205.

Within archaeology there are three areas of specialization. One involves Dr. Augustin F.C. Holl, born in Cameroon, West Africa. As an archaeologist who specializes in spatial analysis of mortuary patterns, Dr. Holl is currently reviewing field records to determine whether traditional burial rites survived the Middle Passage and were practiced in New York's African Burial Ground. A second area involves recovered pipes and beads, currently being analyzed by Christopher R. DeCorse, a specialist in West African archaeology.

The use of CADD represents a third specialization. Robert L. Bethea, Jr., an architect and CADD specialist, has created a draft site plan of the African Burial Ground and is also producing two dimensional and contour maps so that the tops of grave shafts, coffins and skeletal material can be studied in greater detail. Additional plans call for the creation of isometric drawings of the 18th, 19th and 20th century built environment, a useful method for understanding how the site was used.

Among the tasks left to be completed by the archaeological staff are x-rays and inventories of items of personal adornment, coffin tacks, and hardware. In addition, there are plans for a critical study of comparative mortuary practices among Africans, African Americans, Native Americans, and Europeans which will be facilitated by Warren Perry, Kofi Agorsah, Chris DeCorse,

Theresa Singleton and Augustin Holl.

Genetics

Dr. Rick Kittles, a geneticist and biological anthropologist at the Department of Microbiology at Howard University, has also contributed exciting new research findings in relation to the question origins. "Most people tend to identify themselves or look at their origins through the process of ancestry," he explained. "Genetically, we are also able to trace ancestry. For example, we are able to track by looking for mitochondrial DNA which is inherited maternally. Also we can look at Y chromosomes which are inherited paternally. Our goal was to pinpoint the actual geographic place of origin," he continued, "and of course you know that the present regions of West and Central Africa have historically been shown to be the origin of many of the Africans who were enslaved here and in other countries."

The technique used to study DNA, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), allows scientists to rapidly increase just one DNA sample into billions of copies by using an enzyme. First, the samples are cleaned using a solution of hydrochloric acid, "The [bone] samples are in really good shape," he emphasized. "There is really no evidence of any type of destruction from UV radiation (sun), or any type of water damage."

Next, using sterile razor blades, technicians cut several millimeters into the bone so that DNA can be extracted from the bone marrow. Each sample is then crushed and separated by layers of aluminum foil that's been UV radiated, autoclaved (sterilized with steam), and is resistant to tear. Strict precautions are taken so that the room remains free of contaminants.

The results confirm affinities between individuals in New York's African Burial Ground and specific populations in various regions of Africa. Affinities are similar traits inherited and shared by

specific groups of people. Rick's conclusions were based on an important mitochondrial DNA diversity study conducted in Africa in 1996 (Watson). Testing had only been completed for 40 individuals when GSA funding ended, but the promising results include Burial 6, a male in his early 30s, who has an affinity to individuals from the region of Benin in West Africa. Burial 340, a woman with modified teeth who was buried wearing waist beads, has a genetic affinity with the Fulbe of West Africa.

Public Education, Memorialization and the Continued Role of the Community – Since 1993, the primary goal of the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) has been to keep the public updated and involved in the ongoing research of the African Burial Ground. Under the direction of Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, research findings are regularly disseminated through slide presentations, educational symposia, and quarterly newsletters, offering a way for the public to participate, grow, and learn from the Project (see also Memorialization Update in this issue, page 13).

Today, armed with far more answers than we began with, there is no longer any question about who speaks for the ancestors, how the lives of early African New Yorkers are to be historically reconstructed, or even what the role of the community will be. Instead, the Project's solid accomplishments have been made possible through a continuous, dynamic exchange between scientists, historians, public educators and the larger activist community. This alliance has given the African Burial Ground population a voice and visibility which is already positively impacting the educational outlook of younger generations.



AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Allison Manfra

One of the most active volunteers at the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) is Dr. Martia Goodson, a historian and professor at Baruch College. Dr. Goodson recalls reading about the African Burial Ground (ABG) rediscovery in the newspaper near the beginning of the project, but did not become involved with the OPEI until a little while later. She recalls a vague motivation at some point to contact the office and request a presentation for her classes at Baruch. Through this initial contact with the Public Educators from OPEI, Dr. Goodson became interested in learning more about the project.

She began her college education at Antioch College in Ohio, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree. She then received her Master of Arts degree in sociology at Rutgers University, and her Ph.D. from the Union Graduate School. Dr. Goodson's field of interest is oral history, which includes her specific research of oral narratives from formerly enslaved women. Dr. Goodson was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1990 for her book *Chronicles of Faith: The Autobiography of Frederick D. Patterson*. She is currently a faculty member of the Black and Hispanic Studies Department at Baruch College.

It is because of her students that she became motivated to better educate herself about the African presence in colonial New York. Dr. Goodson became frustrated at how uninformed her students were about the existence of African enslavement in New York: "What does it mean that we cannot acknowledge that slavery existed in New York?" It is this facet of history that



Dr. Martia Goodson
Photo credit: Allison Manfra

Dr. Goodson has learned to communicate to her students, and she attributes this reconstruction of history to the events held by the OPEI staff.

Dr. Goodson has formally been a volunteer at OPEI for about two years, but has been promoting OPEI events on campus at Baruch for longer than two years. She is also a founding member of an organization at Baruch known as the Women of Color Network. The organization consists of African American, Latino, and Asian women (staff and faculty), who felt their interests had been marginalized by programs that came to the college. The organization promotes lectures and demonstrations at the college which contribute to the interests and concerns of women of color. Adding to her involvement at Baruch, Dr. Goodson has also taught a Black history class at Abyssinian Baptist Church where she is a member of both the Church and of its Archives and History Committee. Dr. Goodson says that she has tried to make a link between the founding members of the Church and those individuals buried in the African

Burial Ground: "I believe that some of the early members of my Church were undoubtedly buried at the Burial Ground."

Dr. Goodson regrettably admits that upon her initial discovery of the ABG, she did not give it the attention it deserves. She met several Public Educators and became interested in the presentations and activities at OPEI. The "work in progress" feel of the project stimulated some of her excitement toward the ABG as well. Dr. Goodson felt she learned so much from the staff at OPEI that she wanted to reciprocate by contributing as a volunteer. She realizes that there are many people interested in the ABG, and this diversity is reflected in the variety of people involved with the project, such as scientists, historians, or volunteers. Each person's role in the African Burial Ground Project, says Dr. Goodson, is important.

When asked about the future of the ABG, Dr. Goodson emphasized the need to reconstruct history. According to Dr. Goodson, the people who care about the individuals buried in the African Burial Ground have the power to influence its future. Ever since the project began, members of the community have been interested in it. They are obligated to reclaim the history of Africans in New York, and the challenge of finding and freeing this history is the future of the ABG. The most important message, says Dr. Goodson, that must be conveyed as a result of this project, is that the experiences and history of Africans in New York were not marginal, but actually central to the development of New York.



CORNERSTONE COLUMN



This column is devoted to our hardworking OPEI volunteers who are the cornerstone of this Project. It has been established so that they may communicate upcoming events or items of interest to our larger reading audience. We begin with a Thanksgiving Day tribute to the ancestors currently being organized by OPEI volunteers.

African Burial Ground Thanksgiving and Remembrance

Remember and Give Thanks

On Thanksgiving Day morning 1997, a group of students, African Burial Ground Project volunteers and friends gathered at the African Burial Ground site to pay tribute and give thanks for the sacrifices made by the ancestors originally interred there. Those sacrifices made it possible for us to be here today.

We want to make this Remembrance and Thanksgiving an annual event. More help is needed to give the ancestors the recognition that they have earned.

If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

Join us for a tribute of remembrance and thanks to the Ancestors of the African Burial Ground at 290 Broadway.

Candlelight vigil on Wed., Nov. 25, 1998
at 5:30 p.m.

Thanksgiving Day from 11:00 a.m. to
12:00 noon

Bring flowers to create a tribute circle

For further information call
OPEI at (212) 432-5707



OPEI Mini-Calendar of Saturday Events

- ✧ **Saturday, December 19, 1998**
Kwanzaa Film Festival
- ✧ **Saturday, January 22, 1999**
Volunteer Training
- ✧ **Saturday, February 20, 1999**
Film Festival
- ✧ **Saturday, March 27, 1999**
Annual Youth Symposium

**Congratulations to our
1998
Volunteers of the Year**

**Ruth Harden
and
Martia Goodson**

NEWS FLASH!

□ On Saturday, October 24, 1998 workers from New York City's Department of Environmental Protection attempted to repair a broken water main pipe in lower Manhattan. As they dug into the topsoil which covered the century old pipe, they unearthed a skull fragment and clay pipe just a few feet below Chambers Street between Broadway and Centre Street.

Whenever human remains are unearthed at a site, all construction or work of any kind must stop. The workers complied and members of the Medical Examiners office, Mayor's office, and Landmarks Preservation Commission responded. Chambers Street is part of the New York City Commons District, a landmark area which encompasses the African Burial Ground.

Asked to comment on the situation, Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson cited the city's first poorhouse which stood on the site during the 18th century. "Whether they are Irish or African they knew 100 years ago that they were paving over those people," she stated. "At some point they all need to be left to rest."



Bound in the North:

*A Symbolic Narrative
seen through the
African Burial Ground*

Kimberly Paggett

This research has grown out of my efforts to learn about the New York African Burial Ground and its implications about urban enslaved African culture. My intrigue with the various symbols within the African Burial Ground and in urban historical references has led me to view the cemetery as a literary form. Hence, my research examines the Sankofa coffin lid, the waistbeads, the mother/child burial, and the Pinkster Festival as literary elements that inform African culture preserved and transformed by those enslaved in colonial New York.

The literary treatment of the symbols used in this study is done in the same manner as symbols in fiction. In its simplest form, the literary construct symbol refers to any idea, object, or situation that stands for or represents something else beyond it. For literature within the African Diaspora, symbol is an essential element because the culture and practices from which it is born inform its use. In other words, the "obscure private code of meaning" (Baldick) that a symbol infers can best be decoded by those connected to its origin.

Evidence of this idea is seen in narratives of enslaved Africans or their autobiographies. For instance, the urban enslaved Isabella Baumfree details in her autobiography the instant that she changes her name to Sojourner Truth. Not only is this name change an act of rebellion in

shaping and reclaiming her own identity, but it is also symbolic of her connection to the African tradition of the "naming ceremony," in which one is named according to their purpose in life. Thus, the symbolic meaning of Sojourner Truth configures as "one on a constant journey to truth."

The symbol of the Sankofa coffin lid of burial 101 begins the narrative, urging its reader to "go back and fetch it." In other words, learn from the past in order to build for the future (Willis 188). This literary symbol reveals that, within the cultural fabric created by men, women, and children enslaved in colonial New York, there existed an understanding of an African past and future. Herein lies the African-centered understanding of reverence for the ancestors and elders, as well as responsibility for the children. This is interpreted as viewing the ancestors and elders as the past and the children as the future.

The waistbeads found with burial 340, are symbolic of the idea of womanhood within the enslaved African cultural matrix of colonial New York. The 110 waistbeads, varying in colors of cobalt blue, green, red, and white, with eight cowrie shells and two décor beads interspersed (ABG files), represent the story of the enslaved African woman's life and ancestry. In her novel, *The River Where Blood is Born*, Sandra Jackson-Opuku reveals the significance of an Asante woman's waistbeads. The Asante woman tells of her waistbeads, "I sort these story beads, and see in them the lives of the departed. I see the story, my people, from the inside out" (22). She sees in them "from our village in eternity, [that] one hundred years would be but a raindrop in the river. But these have not been normal times. It has

been one hard century for our daughters. But we can't hold our unborn here, protecting them from pain" (83). Indeed, this can be seen as the feelings of those mothers enslaved in colonial New York.

Historian Shane White suggests that motherhood, as it was regarded by enslavers in colonial New York, was a hindrance to their economic productivity (91). This idea is further evidenced in Sojourner's autobiography when she speaks of an enslaver named Hasbrouck, who held an enslaved woman with a child unable to walk or talk. She reveals that the helpless child, "instead of exciting the master's pity...so enraged him, that he would kick the poor thing about like a foot ball." (62) However, enslaved mothers, although hesitant to make their children subject to the horrors of slavery, regarded their role of mother as the protectress of her progeny. The enslaved mother that Sojourner mentions later repays her master's horrid ways in his feeble moments. Her moment of retribution is not so much for her as it is for her child that eventually dies.

Also connected to the waistbead symbol of womanhood and motherhood, is the mother/child burial of burials 335 and 358. This is yet another representation of the idea of motherhood, as well as familial bonds held by those in the enslaved community of colonial New York. The woman lies in her coffin with the baby cradled in her left arm. This show of affection, protection, and love is reminiscent of an African ideal that one is buried with what they may need for the hereafter. Okpoku suggests that "sometimes a mother and daughter meet in the hereafter... Sometimes a soul is allowed to cross over long before her time..."

Yet each soul has a purpose, if only to fertilize the ground for the next generation to come." (83) It is possible that the mother/child burial reveals their need for each other in the life to come. It is also possible that as they enter the ancestral realm, they will ensure blessings of familial bonds for those they left.

It is apparent that the auction block tore families apart and, as sometimes the only parent, women were often torn away from their children. Sojourner remembers the horror of "the auction." She mentions that, not only herself and her brother Peter were "destined to be auctioned," but their mother as well, leaving their father alone." (7) Although their union was spared, so many others were doomed. Hence, the mother/child burial is a symbolic denouncement of familial separation. It is ultimately a spiritual form of resistance. Hence, the burial is a cultural symbol for ensuring familial connections in the future.

The last symbol that will be examined in this study is Pinkster Festival. The Dutch, who first colonized New Amsterdam or New York, introduced Pinkster Festival or Pentecost. As a cultural symbol for the urban enslaved community, Pinkster Festival is associated with the initiation or rites of passage ceremonies and rituals held by many African ethnic groups, celebrating those passing from childhood to adulthood. As described by Shane White, Pinkster Festival is a firm example of how urban enslaved Africans syncretized European culture with African culture. White informs that, in Albany, New York, the week preceding festival:

the negroes patrol the streets in the evening more than usual,

and begin to practice a little upon the Guinea drum. The slaves also set up an encampment on Pinkster Hill [later Capitol Hill]...[where] Toto, or the Guinea dance [is performed by] males and females...After Pinkster...blacks and whites [await ed] the appearance of King Charles...an old Guinea Negro... [who was] the principle character in the festival. For the [next] few days and nights a variety of sports and activities were planned. (96)

The description of Pinkster Festival is almost identical to Armah's description, taken from his novel *The Healers*, of the two week ceremonies and rituals in a Ghanaian village to celebrate the initiation of the males in the community. The main character Densu narrates:

This was the field of rituals. Here the people of Esuano came at the end of every chosen year for rituals of remembrance...in the last two weeks of each chosen year, the generation of youths crossing into manhood ran races and played games of strength and skill [as we danced in celebration]...They were festivals of a people surviving in spite of unbearable pain. They were reminders that no matter how painful the journey, our people would finish it, survive it and thrive again at the end of it, as long as our people moved together. (5)

Indeed this excerpt captures the spirit of Pinkster Festival for those enslaved in colonial New York. Together they created and transformed a culture in the worse situations. What kept their spirits alive is what always sustained them; constant Sankofa, going back to fetch their past. I am convinced that this is the cultural and symbolic message transferred through the African Burial Ground and those enslaved in colonial New York.

Through his use of symbol in the short story *Going Home*, Armah

symbolically captures my approach to this study. The symbol he creates is a woman who attempts to separate grains of sand. Alarmed by her confusion of the sand, she exclaims, "They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything. And how can I find it when they have mixed it with so many things?" (195). The confused women's answer does not lie in the individual granules. But, rather it is found in the unity of the sand granules, which hold the foot prints of her path home. The symbols examined in this study, like granules of sand, together help to form the cultural matrix that trace the enslaved African's literary past in colonial New York.



Works Cited

African Burial Ground File. Washington, D.C.: Cobb Laboratory, 1998

Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Healers*. Kenya: East African Pub. House, 1978

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. NY: Oxford Press, 1990

Oliver, Gilbert, ed. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1976.

White, Shane. *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991.

Willis, W. Bruce. *The Adinkra Dictionary*. Washington, D.C.: Pyramid Complex, 1998.

ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?

Please submit your name and/or corrections to: OPEI, 6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239, New York, New York 10048

OPEI READING LIST

Fall Reading

Barboza, Steven, ed. The African American Book of Values: Classic Moral Stories, 1998.

Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, eds. Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation, 1998.

Brown, James Foster. Betty Shabazz: A Sisterfriend's Tribute in Words and Pictures, 1998.

Dillon, Merton S. Slavery Attached: Southern Slaves and Their Allies, 1619-1865, 1990.

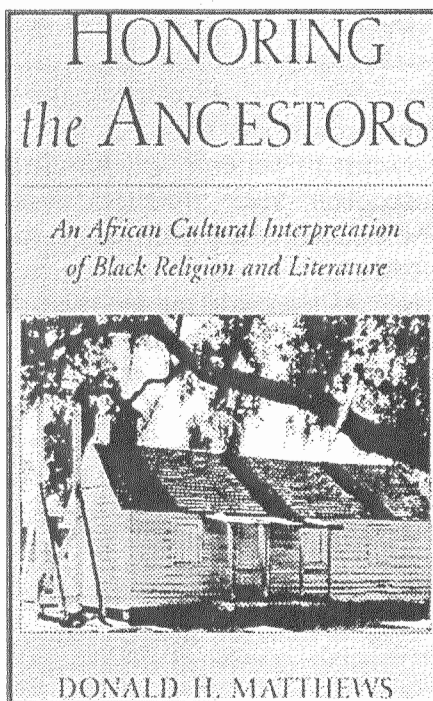
Howe, Stephen. Afrocentrism: Mythical Pacts and Imagined Homes, 1998.

Johnson, Charles & Patricia Smith. Africans In America: America's Journey Through Slavery, 1998.

Larson, Charles R. Under African Skies: Modern African Stories, 1997

Matthews, Donald H. Honoring Our Ancestors: An African Cultural Interpretation of Black Religion and Literature, 1998.

Middleton, Gwendolyn. Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the 18th Century, 1992.



For Young People

Moore, Christopher & Pamela Johnson. Santa and Pete, 1998.

Hudson, Wade and Cheryl Willis Hudson, compilers. In Praise of Our Fathers and Our Mothers: A Black Family Treasury by Outstanding Authors and Artists, 1997

Wilson, Sharon & Valerie Wilson Wesley. Freedom's Gifts: A Nineteenth Story, 1997

Family Holiday Reading

Karenga, Maulena. Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture, 1997

Thomas, Jane Resh & Raul Colon. Celebration!, 1997.

Saint James, Synthia, et al. The Gifts of Kwanzaa, 1997.

Terry, Rod. Kwanzaa: The Seven Principles, 1996.

Hintz, Martin & Kate Hintz. Kwanzaa: Why We Celebrate the Way We Do, 1998.

Eklof, Barbara J. For Every Season: The Complete Guide to African American Celebrations Traditional to Contemporary, 1997.

Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A. African American Special Days, 1996

Porter, Connie, et al. Addy's Surprise: A Christmas Story (The American Girls Collection), 1993

Rollins, Charlemae Hill, compiler, et al. Christmas Gift: An Anthology of Christmas Poems, Songs and Stories Written by and About African Americans, 1993.

Winchester, Faith. African American Holidays, 1996.

◆◆◆

(Continued from page 1)

Even if we were to do the additional work that GSA refused to fund this past June, the ancestral remains will be ready for reburial in the year 1999. The archaeologists, historians, and other researchers are on schedule to finish a major report by the summer of 1999. On the other hand, the GSA has delayed the memorial, interpretive center, and reburial. They have repeatedly circumvented or ignored the advice of African American experts, and no longer believe they can allow reburial in time for the year 2,000.

For those who have not been able to go to OPEI and review our Skeletal Biology Report and other new results, consider this: we have discovered that DNA research is highly feasible and have traced the ancestry of 32 individuals back to specific cultures in Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal and Benin. We have new information on the relationships between Europeans and Africans that fostered the trade in human captives. We show that mostly women and children, brought directly from the continent, were imported to New York in order for Europeans to have greater control and to reduce the risk of rebellion. Despite the large number of young women, we found that Africans of New York were not able to increase their population through reproduction because of the high death rates and stress. The death rate for new arrivals, most notably including adolescent girls and women, was extraordinarily high.

Most males and females were doing excessive work and if they had not died young (as most did) they were frequently cast out into the streets and replaced by new importations. Younger men often slipped away from enslavers regularly enough to participate in street-wise organizations and an underground economy. We have shown that children born in Africa lived healthier lives there than in New York. We have shown how, in the archaeological context, the enslaved continued to care for one another and assert their humanity despite these circumstances. They introduced Europeans to the practice of vaccination which has since saved untold lives. We have published much about how in the 1990s their descendants stood up to defend the dignity and tell the story of these ancestors. We have shared their story with hundreds of thousands of people in the U.S. and around the world in classrooms, churches, mass media, scientific societies, and the United Nations.

The scholars of our project are committed to providing rich information, even if GSA ends its funding in April as they have said they would do. Much, however,

would be lost. If we are to know the origins of more than 40 of the 427 people whose remains were placed in our care; if we are to be able to make comparisons of their lives with those of Europeans and others; if we are to produce interdisciplinary publications for the general public; if we are to have the authority necessary to have experts who are sensitive to the concerns of African Americans see to the completion of the memorial and interpretive center; in other words; if GSA is to support the tasks it approved in order to construct its building in 1993, then only you will make it so, now or never. It is your tax money, it is your project, these are your ancestors and descendants who are affected by these decisions. I want you to know, however, that we have been and remain scholars in service to you, our ethical client.

You can always write your Congressional representatives and ask them to support ending the project now or continuing until planned completion. By all means, call OPEI for more information and for the schedule of the upcoming hearings that will influence the future of the African Burial Ground.

Yours sincerely,



Michael L. Blakey, Ph.D.
Project and Scientific Director

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF UPDATE

- ▼ **WHO'S WHO IN THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT**
- ▼ **THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AFRICAN PRESENCE IN NEW YORK CITY**



African Burial Ground Update

Compiled by OPEI Staff

□ OPEI Staff visits Howard University

In order to keep the OPEI public education staff abreast of the latest developments in the analysis of the ancestral remains, the staff now makes two overnight trips annually to the Howard University campus. The initial 1998 trip was made in May, and the follow-up visit was made in October. One of the highlights of the October visit for the OPEI staff was receiving project updates from geneticist, Dr. Rick Kittles and art historian, Dr. Kwaku Ofori-Ansa. The staff also took a tour of the Cobb laboratory and held a one-on-one, in depth discussion with Professor Mark Mack, laboratory director and Dr. Michael L. Blakey, Project and Scientific director.

- S.D.W.

□ Sixth Work Completes Public Art Honoring

the African Burial Ground. The sixth and most recent artwork, soon to be installed at 290 Broadway, is by Melvin Edwards. A sculpture, made of stainless steel and bronze will be situated at the eastern end of the lobby, facing the African Burial Ground. This completes the collection of public art linked by a common theme of paying homage. The artwork can be seen Mon. through Fri. during normal business hours.

- E.B.

Related Matters:

□ Newark Burial Ground Used As Industrial Site

Several lawsuits have recently been brought against city officials of Newark, New Jersey for their role in turning their backs on a cemetery dating back to 1869. By leasing the site to industrial firms, sometime after 1960, the site eventually became a storage yard and industrial site. Yet, the remains of thousands of poverty stricken individuals, including many stillborn babies and young children, are still buried there. Since the first lawsuit was first filed, many other individuals have come forward to produce documents indicating that family members had been buried there. City officials have acknowledged wrong-doing in relation and will take measures to restore the cemetery which may cost several million dollars.

- E.B.

□ The James Brown House

Ear Inn Alert!! Little known fact. The African Burial Ground is one of only two African American landmarks in lower Manhattan. The other African American site is the historic James Brown House located at 326 Spring Street. James Brown, an African American aide to George Washington, became a tobacco merchant after the Revolutionary War. He built the house in 1817 on the Hudson River. The building is today one of the oldest public establishments in New York State, designated a City landmark in 1964 and placed

on the Register of Historic Buildings in 1978. It has functioned as a pub, (the Ear Inn) and neighborhood restaurant since the post colonial era. Like other ancient structures of old New York, time and surrounding building development has taken a toll on the James Brown House (see below).

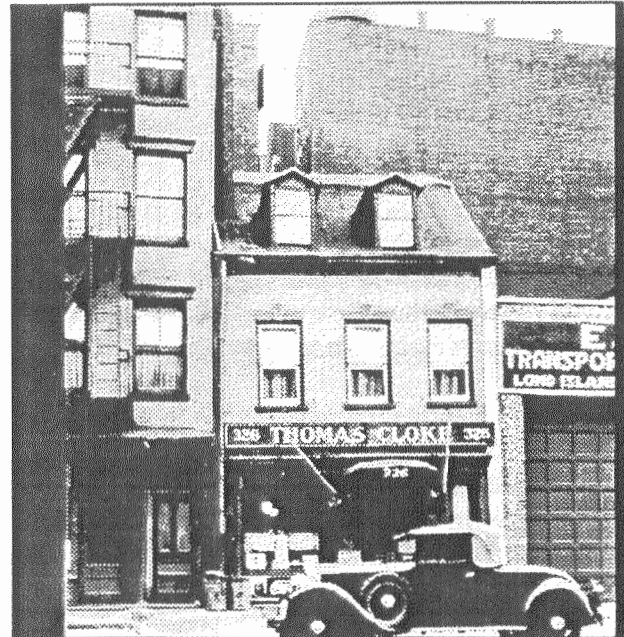


Photo furnished by Rip Hayman

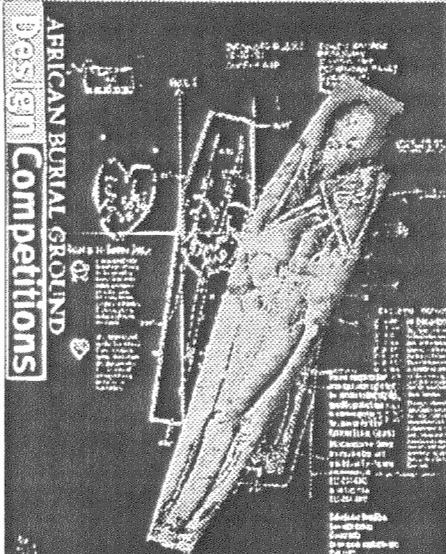
A current New York State Department of Transportation water main project now endangers this historic house. Excavation and construction of a new 4 foot water main along Spring Street will, according to Ear Inn resident Rip Hayman, "rock the very uprights of the James Brown House. The Ear Inn restaurant and the upstairs apartment may be doomed by the potential demise of the James Brown House. But the real tragedy of this State public works project would be the loss of the historic building, one of the last of its architectural breed..." House tours are available -- see it while it lasts! **For more information, or to sign the House petition, contact Rip Hayman at (212) 966-0791**

- S.D.W.

□ The Middle Passage Monument Ceremonial Cruise.

From June 26, 1999 through July 3, 1999 the Homeward Bound Foundation will sponsor a Middle Passage Monument Journey. The ship departs New York on June 26 to Bermuda and then on to the monument site, 427 kilometers east of New York, facing towards Africa. Describing what promises to be in his words "a profoundly healing experience," founder and organizer Wayne James informs us that during the cruise "participants will attend on-board lectures by world class scholars and celebrities, participate in cultural activities and visit historically significant sites. On July 2, 1999, participants will witness the lowering of the Middle Passage Monument during the ceremony at sea." **For details call the foundation toll free at (888)334-9229 or the office at (202) 333-0911.** - E.B.

MEMORIALIZATION UPDATE From the Desk of the Project Executive Peggy King Jorde



Brochure distributed by the Memorialization Office
design by S&S Graphics, Inc. NYC

African ancestry, it has been through our perpetual acts of remembering that the African Burial Ground has been profoundly commemorated as a sacred and living memorial.

As a part of your personal acts of remembering, you are encouraged to contemplate the works of art which were commissioned for a permanent exhibit in the lobby of the Federal office building at 290 Broadway honoring those buried in the African Burial Ground. You may also visit the adjacent burial site to acknowledge the ancestors resting there and those who will be reinterred in the future. For further information on the African Burial Ground Memorialization, or to share how you may contribute in a meaningful way, please contact:



Peggy King Jorde, Project Executive

26 Federal Plaza, Room 1605, New York, N.Y. 10278

Telephone: (212) 264-6949; fax: (212) 264-4082

e-mail:peggy.king-jorde@gsa.gov

Dear Friends of the African Burial Ground,

When will Memorialization take place?

The millennium is fast approaching and for many of us the beginning of the 21st Century is anticipated to mark significant milestones personally and communally. The year will abound with celebrations of all kinds and although the memorialization for the African Burial Ground is currently no longer expected to occur by the year 2,000, our continuous acts of remembering the ancestors need not be diminished.

It has been through your expressed inquiries and concerns, interests and commitment and particularly, your acts of remembering this important National Historic Landmark that the African Burial Ground is reaffirmed as one of this millenium's most important "living" memorials.

Since the moment of the African Burial Ground's rediscovery, the site has been deeply acknowledged through community events, prayer and candlelight vigils, libation ceremonies, educational tours, offerings of candles and flowers, poetry, music, art, and more. Yet, although the Memorial and the Interpretive Center will serve as important physical reminders to keep us close to the culture, history and lives of New York's



REMEMBER YOUR HISTORY

VOICES OF OLD NEW YORK

CATHERINE FERGUSON: MOTHER OF OLD NEW YORK

Joan Maynard and Sherrill D. Wilson

Children in early New York City found life especially difficult from the very beginning of the European establishment of New Netherlands, through the British occupation and early American period. The very survival for the youngest New Yorkers depended on many factors beyond their control.

The fact that of the 427 excavated human remains of the African Burial Ground nearly half are infants and young children is evidence of a high infant mortality rate among 18th century African Americans.

The death rate among all groups of New Yorkers was high during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. A lack of medical care and good nutrition, in addition to exposure to the elements, regular epidemics of smallpox, malaria, cholera, and yellow fever plagued early New Yorkers. Children and the elderly were most susceptible. It was a common event that some children were left orphans after an epidemic. All poor children worked, often at dangerous occupations. Children often competed with homeless men and women in begging for food and money from passersby on the Bowery and at public markets.

Many women, both African American and European, were motivated to find ways to care for the youngest victims of the harshness of early urban poverty in New York. Catherine Ferguson, also known as Katy, stands out as a beacon of hope in the history of this city and its caring efforts for the young. Catherine Ferguson adopt-

ed and cared for forty-eight abandoned and orphan children, between 1810 and 1852.

Catherine Ferguson was born enslaved in 1779, in route from Virginia to New York. At eight years old, Catherine and her mother were separated when her owner sold her mother.



Catherine Ferguson, 1779-1854

Catherine bought her freedom for \$20,000 at age sixteen and married Frances Ferguson, a carpenter. Catherine and Frances had two children who died before they were five years old. Some say that Catherine's love and abiding concern for children came from her early experiences of being separated from her own mother and losing her children.

Catherine worked as a silk dyer, seamstress, cake baker, pastry cook, confectioner, and a merino shawl washer between 1812 and the year of her death 1854.

The Ferguson family lived at 26 Barclay Street, 55 Warren Street, 39 Warren Street, 51 Warren Street, 32 Hudson, 9 York Street and 84 Sullivan Street between

1812 and 1850. In 1851 she moved to 74 Thompson Street where she owned and operated a Pastry Shop.

When the family resided at 55 Warren Street in 1814, Catherine conducted bible classes at her house for local children. A local minister, Dr. John Mason, heard of this Sabbath school and visited the Ferguson home. He invited Catherine to bring her school to his church. The Sunday school movement in New York was then born as a result of Catherine Ferguson's efforts. Despite the fact that Catherine was illiterate, she knew the value of education.

In 1818 there were 88 pupils registered in the Sunday school. Twenty six were African American and the remainder were European. In learning to recite their catechism and honoring God, the children also learned to read.

In her own home Catherine raised twenty eight African American children and twenty European children who were left to the streets and the orphanages of early New York. She died of cholera in 1854, two years after being widowed by Frances in 1852. She was interred at Cypress Hill Cemetery in Queens.



Bibliographic Sources:

Brown, Hallie Q. Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction. NY: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Harris, M.A. "Spike" A Negro History Tour of Manhattan. NY: Greenwood Press, 1968.

Negro History Bulletin. December 1972.

New York City Directories (1800-1854).

▲▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*

African Burial Ground

1999 Poetry, Short Story & Essay

C o m p e t i t i o n

Guidelines

*This competition is open to students in elementary, junior high, high school and college.

*One winner and one runner up will be chosen from each of the above categories.

*Winning entries will be published in the Update: Newsletter of the African Burial Ground Project.

*This competition is for poetry, short story and essays on the subject of the N.Y. African Burial Ground or the early New York African presence. Short story and essay entries should be 1200 words or less. Poetry entries should be 150 words or less.

*Evaluation of submissions will be based on theme, clarity, and originality.

*All entries must be received by January 30, 1999, along with an official entry form.

For an entry form & information package call:
212-432-5707

▲▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*▲*

The Middle Passage

Mario Armando Maldonado ®

Dedicated to the OPEI Staff:

Over a trail of African bones
Rise the waves of the Atlantic;
With swishing sighs and windy moans
That, sometimes, seem afrantic;
And when the day approaches dusk
Ebony spirits haunt the liquid husk.

Slavers plied the ocean waters
On the intercontinental routes;
Decks so packed! With forlorn squatters
That, oftentimes, broke the most stout;
Filth, Disease, and Hunger ravaged the hulls,
Death stalked upon the suffering souls.

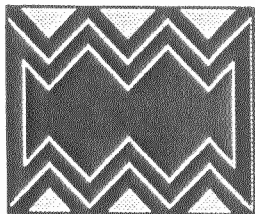
From West Africa, the ships came -
Came out of Ghana, Amobey and the Kongo;

Glutted with their trade, with their shame -
With cargos of Ashanti, Yorubas and
Bakongos;
People that were subjected to a trail of tears -
Enslaved to toil in the Western Hemisphere.

Europe grew robust with the wealth
Reaped from the transatlantic trade;
The New World throve with the economic
health
Obtained with the Black Gold of African raids;
São Paulo, Saint Domingue and New
Amsterdam
Became the ports of entry for the Damned.

The Flower of Black Africa
Was carried in captivity across the sea;
And, now, the survivors, the Diaspora
Honor those who were buried deep beneath;
Oyo, Ibe and Loango fell
So that the white man could live well.

Over a trail of African bones
Rise the waves of the Atlantic;
With swishing sighs and windy moans
That, sometimes, seem afrantic;
And when the day approaches dusk,
Ebony spirits haunt the liquid husk.



Office of Public Education and Interpretation
of the African Burial Ground
U.S. Custom House
6 World Trade Center, Rm. 239
New York, N.Y. 10048

ADDRESS

